

# **System Configuration Team (SCT)**

## **Reasonable & Prudent Measure #26**

### **Meeting Notes**

**February 17, 2000**

#### **Greetings and Introductions.**

The February 17 meeting of the System Configuration Team was held at the National Marine Fisheries Service offices in Portland, Oregon. The meeting was chaired by Bill Hevlin of NMFS. The agenda and a list of attendees for the February 17 meeting are attached as Enclosures A and B.

The following is a distillation (not a verbatim transcript) of items discussed at the meeting, together with actions taken on those items. Please note that some enclosures referenced may be too lengthy to routinely include with the meeting notes; copies of all enclosures referred to in the minutes are available upon request from Kathy Ceballos of NMFS at 503/230-5420.

#### **I. Adult Studies – Results of the Clarkston Meeting and Update on Study Plans.**

As you will recall, said Hevlin, at the last meeting, there were some strong feelings expressed about the need to do these two pilot adult studies in 2000, given their potential biological effects, and the fact that the research wasn't really tied or relevant to the management of the system. It was agreed to shift this debate to the adult studies technical work group meeting

in Clarkston, in the hope that the participants in that meeting could resolve some of these concerns. Mike Langeslay chaired that meeting, Hevlin said, and he is here today to provide an overview of the discussion, and the subsequent modifications to the study designs.

Langeslay distributed a variety of documents related to the FY'00 adult fish studies, including Enclosure C, a summary of the discussion at the January 28 Adult Fish Studies Review Group meeting in Clarkston. His other handouts included a memo, dated February 16, from Steve Pettit expressing IDFG's views on the proposed adult studies (Enclosure D), a revised final research proposal for Study ADS-00-2 (Evaluation of Migrational Delays on the Reproductive Success of Adult Hatchery Spring Chinook Salmon in the Columbia and Snake Rivers) (Enclosure E), and the preliminary study proposal for Matt Mesa and David Geist's FY'00 adult studies, which would evaluate energy expenditure in adult salmon and steelhead migrating upstream in the Columbia and Snake, as well as the influence of delay, fallback, water temperature and dam operations on fish performance.

At the January 28 meeting, said Langeslay, most of the concerns were raised by Oregon and Idaho; they had to do with the management application of the research, the applicability of the study results to wild fish, and the misapplication of CRFM funds. Subsequently, said Langeslay, I received a memo from Steve Pettit (Enc. D) reiterating Idaho's opposition to NMFS' work and the EMG study.

Since then, he continued, I have talked to Steve and asked him how he would feel about the EMG study if it was focused on Lower Columbia fish only – the researchers feel they can still do a valid pilot study if no Snake River fish are used, Langeslay said. The study proposal was revised such that no upriver fish will be used, either in the laboratory or in the field; the study will also focus on fallback and delay only at Bonneville Dam, he explained.

The study proposal for the NMFS work was also modified, Langeslay said; the hatchery component was dropped, and the study will now focus on the non-lethal lipid estimation in non-Snake River fish. The Corps still feels that it would be very valuable to know what these fish's actual energy budget is, he said. The other element of this study would be to use the fish the U of I researchers are going to be tagging to do a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between migration behavior and survival to the hatcheries, said Langeslay. Again, he said, we feel this would provide some very useful information, without any additional fish handling. That, in essence, is how the two proposals have been revised, he explained.

So the bottom line is that the two studies have been extensively modified in response to the concerns raised by Idaho and others, and you would now like some feedback on these revised studies? Hevlin asked. That's correct, Langeslay replied, adding that, in response to other concerns raised by Idaho, the researchers have added six more radio-tag receivers in John Day pool, and the Corps is committed to another year of intensive quality control for its fish counters at both The Dalles and John Day.

How much money are we talking about for these two studies? asked Tom Lorz of CRITFC.

About \$400,000 for the EMG study, and about \$170,000 for the NMFS coordinated development and the radio telemetry and PIT-tag analyses, Langeslay replied. And what has changed in the EMG study? asked Ron Boyce of ODFW. We have taken out the verification between upriver fish and lower river hatchery fish (the laboratory element), and we have eliminated the field work at The Dalles in FY'01, Langeslay replied – we will be using only Little White Salmon Hatchery spring chinook for those two elements.

Boyce asked that Langeslay prepare a written summary of the changes to these research proposals, and that FPAC be given an opportunity to review the changes. Hevlin said that, given the short time-frame before this research has to get underway, rather than punting this issue back to FPAC, he would prefer that the SCT attempt to reach a decision at today's meeting, at least on one of the studies.

Boyce said FPAC could discuss these studies at their February 22 meeting, and provide feedback that day. Rock Peters replied that the Corps views this as an SRWG technical issue, not an FPAC issue; we have already received the SRWG's feedback, he said, and feel that the studies have been adequately reviewed by that group. Boyce said he is an SRWG member, and does not share Peter's view.

Pettit said Idaho still does not support the NMFS studies, even with the modifications described by Langeslay at today's meeting. He added, however, that if the EMG study is going to focus on passage at Bonneville, using downriver fish only, IDFG would withdraw its opposition to that study. Yoshinaka said the Fish and Wildlife Service would support the EMG work as a one-year pilot study; Lorz said CRITFC supports the EMG work on a feasibility level for this year only. Rod Woodin said WDFW neither supports nor opposes the EMG study. Boyce said he needs to have further discussion about both studies with others at ODFW before he can decide whether to support or oppose them.

What about the additional study of unaccounted loss at John Day? Peters asked – how does the SCT feel about that? After a brief discussion, various SCT members expressed their support for this work; no one expressed opposition, with the understanding that this, too, will be a one-year pilot study.

We will continue to move out on the EMG study, then, said Peters, as well as the work at John Day and Bonneville. He added that Langeslay will develop a brief summary of the changes to the NMFS proposal, and will send it out for review as soon as possible. The Corps will then make a decision about what we want to do, he said. Hevlin asked that comments on the NMFS studies be emailed to him, and said he will be responsible for passing that input on to the Corps.

Ted Bjornn asked whether the decision to allow no tagging of CSS fish in 2000 is irrevocable, or whether there is a chance that some limited tagging of CSS fish might be allowed, so that the study can be completed. After a few minutes of discussion, Pettit said FPAC was responding largely to concerns raised by the oversight committee; he suggested that that group needs to be brought into this discussion. This work is important enough that I would be willing to meet with the advisory group, and present the evidence we have, Bjornn said. Hevlin said he will call Michele DeHart to arrange this meeting.

## **II. Lower Granite Fishway Weir Modifications.**

Rebecca Kalamasz said the Corps has recently discovered that a delay has arisen in the Lower Granite fishway weir modification work. The in-water component of this project is on schedule only if the Corps lets the contract by tomorrow, said Kalamasz. Also, due to delays in materials acquisition, the contractor will not be able to get the pieces he needs for the walkway, or for the plate that will be lowered to raise the height of the weir, before the start of the fish passage season, she said. Looking at the schedule the contractor has given us, she said, it will be late April before those components can be installed.

The group spent a few minutes discussing the work items that can be completed in the interim; Jim Ceballos noted that this work will be restricted to nighttime hours only, and that flow through the ladder will need to be decreased if this work is to be accomplished. If we can get the work done in one or two nights, he said, I'm in favor of it. Pettit said he had discussed this issue with Kalamasz prior to today's meeting; he said that, while he is concerned about the necessity for in-water work during the fish passage season, Idaho's view is that these fishway weir modifications need to be tested. Lorz said CRITFC, too, supports this project, as described by Kalamasz. If there are any major modifications, however, we would like to know about them, Lorz said.

After a few minutes of additional discussion, no SCT objections were raised to the Corps' proposal, as long as the work at Lower Granite is accomplished within a two-day period, during nighttime hours, and the SCT is notified if any major problems arise. Kalamasz said she will summarize this discussion in an email.

## **III. Lower Granite Spillway Operations During the Spring Surface Bypass Evaluation.**

Jim Ceballos distributed Enclosure H, a spreadsheet summarizing the results from the model runs on the planned special operations at Lower Granite this spring, showing the percentage of fish spilled, the percentage collected, estimated fish passage efficiency and the difference in FPE among the six alternative operations modeled. He spent a few minutes going through this information; the bottom

line, said Ceballos, is that, given the desire for a constant forebay hydraulic condition, NMFS is recommending Option 4 (20% spill + SBC around the clock) for the 2000 migration season.

After a brief discussion, no SCT objections were raised to NMFS' recommendation that Option 4 be implemented in 2000. Pettit said he will need to check with others at IDFG to ensure that his agency is in agreement. Thor said BPA would prefer a somewhat lower percentage of spill during daytime hours, with higher spill at night to compensate. Hevlin replied that the researchers have been fairly adamant that constant day and night forebay conditions are necessary to a valid study. Lorz said CRITFC's preference would be for higher spill levels during both day and nighttime hours.

#### **IV. McNary Juvenile Channel Bulkhead.**

Donna from the Corps Walla Walla District reported that the contractor for this work has completed only one unit, and has begun work on a second. We have permission to continue work in this area until March 16, she said; we project that the contractor will be able to finish work on only four units prior to that date. Under the worst-case scenario, if it takes the contractor three weeks per unit, that means we're looking at an additional 33 weeks – eight months – to get this work done, said Donna. That puts us at around November 1, if we're allowed to continue working.

Donna said the Corps has been working to obtain an extension of the in-water work window; NMFS needs to agree to this extension, however, and it is by no means certain that they will do so. Hevlin noted that the other salmon managers will also need to agree on that extension. Donna added that the decision will need to be made by March 10, if work is to proceed past March 16. A site visit is scheduled for February 23, at which NMFS and others will have an opportunity to inspect the work and evaluate its potential impacts to spring migrants.

Ceballos added that, if work does stop on March 16, there is some question about whether or not the contractor will be able to finish this task prior to the 2001 migration season. If we get the same work window we had this year – September 1-March 16 – he should be able to finish, even if work stops on March 16 this year, Donna said. Basically, we just wanted everyone to be aware of this problem, said Mike Mason; if there is any way we can keep the contractor working past March 16, we'll probably be better off, in terms of the likelihood that the project will be finished prior to the start of the 2001 migration season.

#### **V. Review of Draft Response letter to CRITFC's Inquiry Concerning Action on the Tribes' FY'00 Proposals and Priorities.**

Hevlin distributed Enclosure J, the draft response letter to CRITFC's inquiry concerning action on the tribes' FY'00 proposals and priorities. He asked the SCT for any comments they may have; a few minor wording changes were suggested, which Hevlin said he will incorporate into a new draft of the letter. He then went through the SCT's response to the 17 CRITFC-recommended projects item by item (please see Enclosure J for details), answering a few questions along the way and ensuring that the language in the letter is an accurate reflection of what was decided by the SCT. Hevlin asked that any additional comments be provided to him by next Wednesday, February 23.

## **VI. John Day Drawdown Draft Phase I Study Report.**

John Kranda said the Corps' intent was to provide a 30+-day review period for the John Day Drawdown Phase I study, to be completed by March 31. Copies of the report should be available by Monday, in both hard copy and CD-ROM; Kranda said he will mail copies to all SCT participants.

Boyce asked about the schedule for this effort; Kranda replied that, again, the current plan is to take comments on the report through March 31. As you're aware, Kranda said, the Corps' recommendation in this draft report is to not continue the study beyond Phase I; that recommendation will be finalized, one way or the other, once the comment period ends. In other words, at that point, after reviewing the comments, the Corps will decide whether or not to stick with that recommendation, Kranda said. The Corps hopes to have the report in final form, and on its way to Congress, by July, he explained.

Various SCT participants expressed concern about the limited amount of time left for review of the Lower Snake EIS and John Day drawdown report; Hevlin asked Kranda to convey that concern to others at the Corps. Kranda said he will do so, but added that interested parties were given 90 days to comment on the Lower Snake EIS, beginning January 1. Also, he said, in the Corps' view, 30 days is an adequate comment period for the John Day report. Boyce requested that the comment period on the John Day drawdown report be extended by 30 days, to April 30; Jim Ruff said such an extension would also be helpful to NMFS, in the development of the Biological Opinion. So noted, said Kranda.

The Corps' Chuck Willis then distributed copies of the "Salmon Recovery Through John Day Reservoir" summary, an excerpt from the John Day Drawdown Phase 1 report. This summary is attached as Enclosure K. He also provided Enclosure L, a series of fisheries benefit summaries for Alternatives 1 and 2 (John Day drawdown to spillway crest with or without flood control), Alternative 3 (John Day drawdown to natural river channel without flood control) and Alternative 4 (John Day drawdown to natural river channel with flood control). The charts show the estimated biological benefit – factors such as decreased travel time, juvenile survival rate and probability of survival and recovery – for Snake and Columbia River spring/summer and fall chinook, for each alternative, with and without

drawdown of the four Lower Snake projects.

Willis spent a few minutes going through this data; please see Enclosures K and L for details. Willis noted that biological benefits are maximized under Alternative 3 – John Day drawdown to natural river channel without flood control.

The majority of Willis' presentation focused on the "Potential Impacts and Benefits" section of the salmon recovery summary, which begins on Page 20 of Enclosure K. Again, please refer to this document for a summary of this information; some of the highlights included:

- ! Under all four John Day drawdown alternatives, changes to the riverine habitat will result in more streamlike, rather than reservoir, conditions.
- ! The number of native resident fish is likely to increase, as opposed to the introduced species that are currently abundant.
- ! White sturgeon numbers may not increase; although spawning conditions for the species are likely to improve under drawdown, they could be limited in terms of rearing capacity.
- ! In the short term, due to crowding, aquatic predators may take a greater toll if John Day is drawn down; over the long term, however, aquatic predation is expected to decrease.
- ! With respects to the effects of drawdown on juvenile salmonids, the Corps made a number of key assumptions, based on the PATH analysis: first, that barging is largely ineffective; second, that a decrease in travel time will result in an increase in survival rates. Under these assumptions, the Corps estimates that overall survival rates for Snake River spring chinook would probably be about the same under drawdown as they are currently, although modeling results show a slight increase. The major benefit, in terms of increased numbers, would be to Snake River fall chinook. There would also be a small increase in Upper Columbia spring chinook, and a small decrease in Hanford Reach Upriver Bright fall chinook, due to the discontinuation of transportation.

Please see Enclosure K for further details of potential impacts and benefits.

Boyce said ODFW has some fundamental concerns about the assumptions the Corps used in its modeling. Willis replied that, given the fact that Congress is going to use this report to decide whether or not to proceed with further study of John Day drawdown, it made sense for the Corps to present the most optimistic estimate of potential biological benefits, and the lowest estimate of associated cost.

Ruff asked about the apparent discrepancy in the report's conclusions regarding the effects of John Day drawdown on Hanford Reach fall chinook. One of your conclusions is that the

discontinuation of transportation for this species is likely to result in a slight decrease in survival, he said; yet on Page 21, you note that drawdown of John Day reservoir would likely result in a tenfold increase in the amount of spawning habitat available to that species, said Ruff. Adding spawning habitat without adding rearing habitat is unlikely to result in an increase in adult returns, Willis replied.

Is that conclusion supported by any of the studies that have been done? Tom Cooney asked – frankly, this is the first time I’ve heard that conclusion. I’m not sure what you’re asking, Willis replied – it’s simply a statement of logic. The concern is that we simply don’t know how important the productivity of the current John Day reservoir environment is to the success of that stock, whether that productivity might increase under drawdown, or whether we might be shooting ourselves in the foot by drawing down John Day and potentially decreasing the productivity of that habitat, Willis said. We do know, as the report says, that drawdown to natural river level would eliminate approximately 1,400 acres of rearing habitat currently used by fall chinook, which could substantially impact the productivity of that stock.

The group spent a few minutes debating the report’s Hanford Reach fall chinook conclusions; ultimately, Cooney suggested that the Corps report reference the fact that the aggregate upriver bright run could increase substantially if John Day is drawn down. While there might be a net loss of Hanford Reach fish if we believe transportation is effective for that stock, he said, there would be a net gain overall for that type of fish from the huge increase in available spawning area. The information is all there, said Cooney, it’s just not assembled anywhere in the document in that form. That’s true, said Willis – we dealt with those as completely separate issues. It would be helpful if the SCT could get together and talk about the most effective way to present those numbers, he added – I would be happy to meet with you and discuss that. We’re in the comment period, he said, and this document will be changed in response to comments received. If I could meet with you, so that we had an opportunity to jointly develop an approach on this issue, that would be most helpful, Willis said. It was so agreed.

Didn’t you state that it is the Corps’ intent to present the rosier possible picture of the potential biological benefits associated with John Day drawdown to Congress? Cooney asked. That’s correct, Willis replied. Yet the conclusion the Corps has drawn, after looking at all this data, is that, even if we saw this huge increase in aggregate upriver bright fall chinook production as a result of drawdown, is that it is not worth proceeding to Phase 2 of this analysis, said Cooney. That’s correct, Willis replied – we’re saying that, according to our estimates, there would be 55,000 additional spawners, plus 51,000 additional harvestable fall chinook. With all of that taken into account, however, when you factor in a \$3.3 billion cost, the Corps’ conclusion is that proceeding to Phase 2 study is not justified at this time, said Willis – that was the basis for our draft recommendation. To be explicit, he said, what the Corps is saying in this report is that no further study is needed for Congress to make a decision about John Day drawdown.



## **VII. Proposed Changes to AFEP Studies Development and Review Process.**

Boyce said that, at the last SCT meeting, he provided a number of comments and ideas about how the AFEP studies development and review processes might be improved. He distributed Enclosure M, a memo, dated February 16, summarizing his proposed improvements. Boyce then spent a few minutes going through his suggestions. Basically, Boyce recommended the establishment of two separate committees, modeled after the Corps' old FPDEP research review process, one consisting of managers who would establish management needs and objectives for research, and the other consisting of technical experts who would review the experimental design of proposed research to ensure that the study objectives can be met. He added that, in Oregon's view, the annual research prioritization process also needs to begin sooner – in December of the prior year.

The group devoted considerable discussion to Oregon's proposals, and to the general question of how the AFEP process might be improved this year. Ultimately, there was general agreement that initial meetings of a small group of managers – one or two from each agency -- with no researchers present, to discuss research needs and priorities, would probably be more effective than the larger group that was used last year. Perhaps we could at least talk about the projects on which significant disagreement exists, early on in the process, Boyce suggested.

After a few minutes of further discussion, Hevlin summarized by saying that the AFEP process for this year will be similar to the process used last year; the Corps will consider some relatively minor refinements, however. And while we're going through the process this year, Hevlin said, let's all be thinking about significant changes that will make it work better next year. We will develop a package of one-pagers, then coordinate a meeting, consisting of representatives from the fish management and action agencies, but not researchers and consultants, to discuss the draft proposals, Rock Peters said. Following that meeting, the Corps will develop the final package of proposals, he said.

## **VIII. FY'01 CRFM Project List – Preliminary Plan and Timeline for Prioritization.**

Kranda distributed Enclosure G, the most recent FY'01 CRFM spreadsheet. He said the President's FY'00 CRFM budget is \$91 million; the current cost estimate for the FY'00 CRFM program is \$90.5 million, but we're still working on these numbers, and there are still some items, such as the raised crest prototype at John Day, that need to be added to the list. Kranda said cost estimates for these additional measures will be available by the next SCT meeting; it is likely that the final FY'01 CRFM program cost estimate will be somewhere between \$90 million and \$100 million. He added that, typically, Congress does not appropriate the full amount recommended by the President; in all likelihood, said Kranda, we will have less than \$90 million to work with, which means the SCT will have its work cut out for it.

We need to give some thought to the FY'01 prioritization process, to decide how, and how quickly, we want to proceed, Hevlin said. From the Corps' perspective, obviously, the sooner the better, Kranda said - we would like, if possible, to reach agreement on a final FY'01 CRFM program by June, such that we can base our FY'02 budget on a firm foundation. It was agreed to discuss the FY'01 prioritizations further at the next SCT meeting; Kranda said it is the Corps' intention to provide the FY'01 workplans to the SCT prior to that meeting.

BPA's Phil Thor requested that the Corps add three columns to the FY'01 spreadsheet: one showing the total cost of each project, one showing costs to date, and a third showing estimated completion date. Kranda said he will do so.

#### **IX. FFDRWG Update.**

No FFDRWG update was presented at today's meeting.

#### **X. Other.**

**A. Minutes from January SCT Meeting.** Hevlin distributed copies of the January meeting minutes, and said comments on these minutes are due at the next SCT meeting.

**B. ISAB Report on TDA Survival Studies.** Hevlin distributed Enclosure I, the ISAB's report on their review of studies of fish survival and spill at The Dalles Dam. There is an SRWG meeting scheduled for February 25, to work on the studies at The Dalles, John Day and Bonneville, he said, since this is the first time the SCT has seen this report, I would suggest that we discuss it in more detail at that meeting. No SCT objections were raised to this suggestion.

**C. May Meeting and Site Visit.** Hevlin said Monte McClendon has proposed that the SCT's annual site visit be to the Umatilla pump station and hatchery and to McNary Dam, with the SCT meeting held at the Reclamation offices in Hermiston. Various SCT members observed that there is little new to see at McNary; Hevlin asked the participants to suggest alternate site visit locations.

**D. Dworshak Hatchery Water Supply Improvements – Funding Update.** NMFS' John Palensky said the IT recently discussed the funding situation for the Dworshak Hatchery improvements; the conclusion at that meeting was that we couldn't find an appropriate way to fund that project, he said. However, said Palensky, the IT did feel that it might be appropriate to fund it using some of the monies Bonneville has not spent on capital construction activities over the course of the MOA – as most of you are aware, there is about \$180 million available in unspent capital construction funds. It was decided to discuss this issue directly with Bonneville; a subgroup of the MOA work group has been formed and is discussing the Dworshak hatchery improvements. The group has another meeting

next Friday, said Palensky, and we may know more after that meeting. At the moment, however, there isn't much to report, said Palensky. In response to a question from Boyce, Palensky said that, while Bonneville has been willing to discuss the use of unspent capital construction funds for the Dworshak Hatchery improvements, there are many challenges which will have to be overcome before that becomes reality; he added that he will report on the outcome of the subgroup meeting at the March IT meeting.

#### **XI. Next SCT Meeting Date and Agenda Items.**

The next meeting of the System Configuration Team was set for Thursday, March 16, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at NMFS' Portland offices. Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.